



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Human Rights in Turkmenistan

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 11, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Like the European Union, the United States is concerned about recent arrests, detentions and sentencings in Turkmenistan, particularly the cases of writer Rahim Esenov, his son-in-law Igor Kapriylov and journalist Asharkuli Bairiev, as well as former Chief Mufti Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah.

We understand that the 78 year-old Mr. Esenov, was detained upon his return to Turkmenistan from medical treatment abroad. It does not seem that Mr. Esenov, who suffered a heart attack just two days before his detention, was actually charged with a crime.

We are pleased, however, that given the humanitarian considerations of Mr. Esenov's case, he was released on Tuesday. We urge the government of Turkmenistan not to restrict his future movement or activities.

The charges against Misters Kapriyolev and Bairiev are even less clear. We understand only that their detention relates somehow to Mr. Esenov's case. It is reported that Mr. Kapriyolev was released along with his father-in-law, Mr. Esenov, and we welcome this step.

Still, we would like to ask the Government of Turkmenistan for more information about these cases, including the specific grounds for arrest, detention and sentencing. Regarding Mr. Bairiev, we ask whether he has been formally charged and, if so, with what crime. We note that Turkmen law requires that suspects either be formally charged or released within 72 hours, and we call on the Turkmen authorities to abide by this provision of their domestic law.

In addition, we wish to express our concern about reports that former Chief Mufti Nasrullah ibn Ibadullah was convicted of involvement in the November 25, 2002 attack on President Niyazov.

This trial, which was held without the presence of impartial observers, conflicts with Turkmenistan's OSCE commitments to due process in court proceedings and we urge the Government of Turkmenistan to observe international standards in order to ensure that the judicial system operates fairly and that it provides defendants with an adequate opportunity to defend themselves. Moreover, we condemn any attempt to use the courts for political purposes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.